



Blackpool Carers

As part of the Visioning Project, we sought the views of people who use services and carers in the region. This was achieved through the hard work of a dedicated group of people who use services and carers who already play an important part in the interviewing and teaching of social work students at Lancaster University. Two carers from this group, agreed to approach other carers via groups and networks in the Blackpool area. They were asked two specific questions:

***What skills qualities and knowledge do you think social workers should have?
What role should service users and carers have in social work education?***

Eighteen people took part and the following themes emerged from their responses:

What skills, qualities and knowledge do you think social workers should have?

1. Empathy and Understanding

Having the ability to show an empathetic understanding of the person's situation was most frequently mentioned comments such as:

"Social workers must be able put oneself in other peoples circumstances" were common.

2. Communication Skills

The ability to communicate clearly was also a frequent remark. In particular the carers responding mentioned how important it was for social workers to listen, be non-judgemental and to show respect to people who use services and their carers'.

3. Making Time

Along with empathetic understanding and good communication skills, the participants commented on the importance of social workers making time for service users and not 'watching the clock'

4. A holistic understanding

A number of people commented on how they expected a social worker to be able to understand the person and their situation holistically or 'in the whole'. This was seen as a valuable social work skill.

5. Other personal qualities

Other qualities frequently mentioned were:

- Sense of humour
- Sensitivity
- Honesty
- Patience
- Non judgmental
- Reliability

6. Knowledge

The respondents felt it was important for social workers to possess a range of knowledge. A good knowledge of local services was thought to be particularly important. In addition, a number of people considered knowledge with regards to medical and psychological conditions were important. A thorough understanding of the law and the benefit system was also valued by the respondents.

7. Ability to work with other professionals

A number of people commented on the importance of social workers possessing the skills to be good team players and to be able to work collaboratively with other professionals.

8. Other Skills

Computer and recording skills were also considered to be important skills.

9. Experience

Interestingly, a number of respondents commented on the importance they placed on a social worker's experience, both professionally and in terms of their own life experience. A number of carers mentioned 'maturity' as an important attribute.

What role should service users and carers have in social work education?

Respondents felt that service users and carers should be routinely involved in social work education. In particular, they commented on the importance of carers and people who use services sharing their own personal experiences with students.

*“Clients and carers involvement is essential I feel to use as a learning tool
Understanding of the whole situation cannot be achieved without examples of fears,
worries and problems of the individual case”*

*“Service users and carers could explain their experiences (both positive and negative) with
social work students and tell students how the experiences made them feel, what they
learned from those experiences and what they would like to see happen for the future”.*

Some people also considered service users sharing information with regards to their condition and how it impacted upon them, important contributions.

*“Service users could offer to speak about their condition at social work meetings and
social work training sessions (e.g. people living with motor neurone disease)”*

We would like to express grateful thanks to all those who took the time to respond to these questions.